

# The Messianic Vort

## A 5 Minute Message on the Parashah

### Parashat Sh'mini



#### The Love and Fear of God

ספר ויקרא פרק י'  
וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי-אַהֲרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא אֵישׁ מִחַטָּאתוֹ וַיִּתְּנוּ בָהֶן אֵשׁ  
וַיִּשְׂימוּ עָלֶיהָ קִטְרֶת וַיִּקְרִיבוּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֵשׁ זָרָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא  
צִוָּה אֹתָם: וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי ה' וַתֹּאכַל אוֹתָם וַיָּמָתוּ לִפְנֵי  
ה':

Leviticus Chapter 10:1, 2

"The sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire-pan, they put fire in them and placed incense upon it; and they brought before the LORD an alien fire that He had not commanded them. A fire came forth from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD."

Maybe you've heard the phrase describing someone as being "on fire for the Lord." This week's Torah portion comes to teach us that this is not always a positive thing.

There are many opinions in the rabbinical commentaries regarding the exact nature of Nadav and Avihu's sin. However, the one thing they all have in common is that Nadav and Avihu failed to come close to God with a balance between two emotions upon which all service of God is based—*yirat Hashem* (fear or awe of God) and *ahavat Hashem* (love of God).

If you think about it, refraining from sin is a result of the fear and awe of the Almighty, while performing the commandments of God is a result of our love for our Father who gives us life. We must learn to keep these two feelings in balance; otherwise, one whose feeling of fear overpowers the feeling of love for God and may squelch his enthusiasm and fervor for doing God's commandments. Likewise, one whose feeling of love is greater than his awe will lack the proper reverence that is required when coming close to God in His service. *Torat Kohanim* writes: "When they [Nadav and Avihu] saw the fire from Heaven, they were filled with joy, and were moved to add love upon love." Even though their actions were motivated by such intense love, that feeling of love was disproportionate to their fear of God.

Daniel Lancaster, of [First Fruits of Zion](#), tells the following parable: "Two men were traveling through the woods on a cold night. They decided to build a fire. They soon began to feel warm, but the foolish one of the two said to himself, 'If sitting by the fire makes me feel warm, how much warmer would I feel if I sat in the fire!'" It is disturbing how

people show disrespect to God's name. It is taken in vain in the way people speak in their actions. How often do we hear people "prophecy" in His name—at best, some people's "prophecies" are spiritual babble that does not make sense. At worst, they do not come true thereby identifying these as false prophets. In the same way Nadav and Avihu crossed the line by not balancing fear and love of God, Christianity is guilty of claiming all sorts of manifestations of the Holy Spirit that are really man-made, unsanctioned, "alien fire."

This lack of balance between fear and love of God can also negatively impact how a person approaches God's word and those who teach it. Rav Gedaliah Schorr points out that not all disrespect is the result of a lack of appreciation. Many people appreciate God's word and build their lives around learning it and forming relationships with people who teach it.

However, this familiarity can be problematic because it can cause appropriate feelings of respect for God's word and His scholars to lessen. In other words, the intense feelings of love for the word and its teachers can bring about a terrible disrespect.

What is the solution to the constant exposure to God's word and teachers of the word? One should always keep in mind the immense holiness of the Torah itself. The Talmud teaches that one's demeanor when learning Torah must be similar to the state that Israel was in when they first received the Torah—"awe, fear, trepidation, and trembling" (*Berachot* 22a). When one sits down to learn God's word, the most basic thing to keep in mind is that he is not merely studying knowledge. He is learning the Word of God, the Word that became flesh, who dwelled among us and will dwell among us again—His own Son, Yeshua, may it be soon in our days. When a person learns God's word in the proper way, in a way that is *כָּשֶׁר* (*kosher*, meaning "appropriate"), his personality is transformed.

In this week's portion we are also told, "...make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean, and so as to teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them through Moshe." (Leviticus 10:10, 11)

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God is so holy, so beyond our nature, so unlike human beings. Lancaster points out that the story of Nadav and Avihu illustrates that it is a dangerous thing to have the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob dwell in our midst. Yet His word, specifically His Torah, guards us in our relationship to the Almighty by protecting us from violating His holiness.

When we come before God in prayer, open His word to learn, listen to His preachers, ministers, and teachers, and most importantly to do His commandments, it is upon us to realize that we are weak and mortal beings—merely dust—who are entering the court of the King of kings, about to draw near to serve Him. This in and of itself should fill us with fear and awe. At the same time, while this is surely the *kosher* frame of mind when doing God's commandments or studying His word, God in His mercy still desires our service and we must never refrain from doing His commandments out of embarrassment for our past sins or because of who we are. After the initial, proper feeling of the fear of God, we must be bold in our love of Him and serve Him with zeal and confidence.

May your week be filled with His shalom!